

Mayor Greg Nickels' Speech at the Forum Discussing the Future of Downtown Seattle
Monday November 10, 2003, 6 p.m.

Today, we start a conversation around important questions: How should our city grow? How can we protect our great neighborhoods? Reduce suburban sprawl? Increase density where people want it? Create jobs? Expand the market for transit? Create great new neighborhoods?

Seattle is expected to grow by 100,000 people over the next 20 years. Where should they live?

And finally, how best can we plan for the opportunities presented by replacement of the Viaduct – the most significant physical change to our downtown since the Denny Regrade in 1898?

We've just released the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the greater downtown. We're taking the first step toward rewriting the rules for height and density, for setbacks and streetscapes. But really it is not just a process of environmental review that we're undertaking - it really is a conversation.

We're moving forward on a goal all of us share: making downtown a great neighborhood, making it a great place to live, work, shop and recreate. We want to make downtown a great place to do more than one or two of these things.

Great things are happening throughout the city – in Northgate, South Lake Union, the University District and the Rainier Valley - we are creating jobs, working to create new housing, and making great urban centers.

Downtown is getting new investment like the new Rem Koolhaas library; expansion of Washington Mutual and tripling of Seattle Art Museum; a new sculpture park; and, most exciting, we are making progress on replacing the Viaduct and reconnecting Seattle to its waterfront.

We're also seeing real progress on our great civic headache—traffic congestion. With work going forward on the Monorail, the streetcar, and improvements to bus service, we are creating transit hubs to connect downtown to the region. On Saturday, we finally broke ground on light rail, the critical piece of our 21st Century transportation network.

Taking this work together, we are building hubs that will transform how our city grows and how we think about mobility. We are creating a great new reason for living downtown: you will not need a car. Think about it. By the end of this decade, you'll be able to get to Westlake by light rail, monorail, bus and streetcar and you'll be able to transfer seamlessly between these modes of transportation to get wherever you want to go. Similarly at King Street Station and Colman Dock, you'll be able to move back and

forth between these different modes without having to make a choice to get into an automobile.

This city does not want more freeways. We want mobility. We want a transportation system that serves the city and the values of its people, not a city that serves a transportation system.

More people living downtown is good for Seattle and for the entire region because it reduces suburban sprawl and protects our great single-family neighborhoods; increases the market for public transit and reduces the need for cars; and promotes public safety by getting more “eyes on the street” 24 hours a day.

Downtown today is a great place for jobs, shopping and entertainment – but we need to increase housing for all. That means market-rate and affordable housing.

To get that, we need:

- common-sense development rules that encourage housing,
- improved east-west connections for pedestrians and transit riders (make it easy to travel from the waterfront to first hill),
- ways to make our downtown open spaces like Freeway Park more accessible, friendly, active and safe,
- to encourage what makes a downtown neighborhood livable – grocery stores, interesting design, friendly streets, and schools.

We also need to work even harder to make sure city departments are working together to promote housing. We’ve done well in Belltown and have taken good steps in Pioneer Square. But we must show results in the International District Chinatown. Right now there are 750 units of unoccupied housing there.

Vancouver has a downtown where people love to live. That’s why we invited Gordon Price who, as a councillor for the City of Vancouver, helped create a great downtown neighborhood. Vancouver made it easier for people to give up their cars, and downtown traffic actually declined.

We can learn from Vancouver, both similarities and differences, and in Seattle we can make a great city even better.

Today we are taking another step in the right direction. Moving forward on the direction the public wanted when it said yes to growth management, neighborhood planning, finances for buses, light rail and the Monorail.

This is the kind of growth Seattle wants. We are channeling growth into the greater downtown, creating transit links to a revitalized Northgate, South Lake Union, the University District and to Rainier Valley. We’re using transit not just as a convenience but also as a means to provide economic opportunity for all. This work involves hard, sustained effort but we must get the job done, and we will.

We are moving forward on the dreams of a great city.